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PML-N largely sweeps lacklustre by-elections

• Ruling party bags NA seats in Lahore, D.G. Khan, Sahiwal, Faisalabad; candidates lead other contests in Faisalabad, Haripur as per initial, unofficial results • PPP wins one Punjab seat; five go to PML-N, with latter's lead in PP-98 race • ECP chief downplays low participation, says voters not interested due to low stakes • PTI alleges rigging in Lahore and Haripur; boycotts all other contests

By Amjad Mahmood, Imran Gabol, Muhammad Sadaqat and Syed Irfan Raza

LAHORE/HARIPUR/ISLAMABAD: After polls closed in by-elections across 13 constituencies — for six national and seven provincial assembly seats — in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the ruling PML-N bagged almost all seats, except for one in Muzzafargarh, which was secured by the PPP, unofficial results showed in the early hours of Monday morning.

The PML-N was also leading the polls in three other constituencies: two national and provincial seats in Faisalabad and one NA seat in Haripur, where the unofficial results had not been announced till the filing of this report.

The six NA constituencies where polling was conducted included NA-18 (Haripur), NA-96 and NA-104 (Faisalabad), NA-129 (Lahore), NA-143 (Sahiwal) and NA-185 (Dera Ghazi Khan). The seven Punjab Assembly constituencies up for grabs included PP-73 (Sargodha), PP-87 (Mianwali), PP-98, PP-115, PP-116 (Faisalabad), PP-203 (Sahiwal), and PP-269 (Muzaffargarh).

Amid an opposition boycott and low voter turnout, the by-polls were held in response to the disqualification of a number of PTI lawmakers following their conviction in May 9 violence cases. The main opposition PTI, however, stayed away from the electoral exercise, save for two National Assembly constituencies in Lahore and Haripur. The PML-N fielded its candidates on all seats except in Muzaffargarh, and the PPP contested on two NA and one Punjab seat.

By Sunday night, the PML-N was in a position to win all the Punjab seats, except for PP-269, where the ruling party had not fielded a candidate against PPP's Alamdar Qureshi.

According to Form-47 issued after midnight, PML-N candidate Mahmood Qadir Khan defeated PPP's Dost Mohammad Khosa by securing 82,419 votes against his rival's 49,226 votes in NA-185. In Lahore's NA-129, Mohammad Nauman of the PML-N emerged victorious with 63,441 votes while independent Arslan Ahmad got 29,099 votes.

The ruling party also bagged the Sahiwal NA-143 seat, as its candidate secured 119,334 votes as per the unofficial results. Even before the Form-47 was issued, PM Shehbaz Sharif had congratulated Tufail Jutt, saying, "Undoubtedly, with the victory in NA-143, the public has expressed its trust in the spirit of public service of the PML-N." In a tweet, he also congratulated the Lahore and Sahiwal provincial assembly candidates.

In NA-104, PML-N's Danyal Ahmad bagged 52,791 votes against independent candidate Rana Adnan Javed's 19,262 votes.

In NA-96, PML-N's Mohammad Bilal Badar secured 61,808 votes while independent candidate Nawab Sher Waseer

Continued on Page 5

LAHORE: Policemen check voters' ID on their arrival at a polling station in the Awan Town locality.—PPI

Alarmed by weakness of audit mechanism, IMF calls for independent AGP office

• Warns of fiduciary risks to Rs40tr in public funds • Questions why auditor general's office remains attached to federal secretariat • Audit process bogged down by over 6,000 reports a year, minimal PAC follow-up

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has expressed serious concern over the absence of an internal audit mechanism and weak constitutional and parliamentary audit supervision in Pakistan, warning that these gaps pose major fiduciary risks to public funds estimated at about Rs40 trillion at the federal level and even higher in the provinces.

It has called for a fully independent Office of the Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) to ensure better value for taxpayers' money.

In a detailed section in its Governance & Corruption Diagnosis Assessment (GCDA), the IMF has identified a series of weaknesses in Pakistan's internal financial controls, internal and external audit systems and practical subservience of the AGP to the executive despite its constitutional autonomy, besides insufficient capacity and role of the parliamentary oversight through the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

It is therefore unsurprising that cases of financial irregularities, embezzlement and corruption running into trillions of rupees continue to surface year after year.

The Fund said an effective internal control system was essential for creating an environment that ensured appropriate decision-making regarding the use of public resources, with clear accountability for such decisions, including via administrative structures, as well as external oversight by a supreme audit institution and the legislature.

"Both internal and external audits are vital in maintaining the integrity of an organisation's operations and financial reporting, thereby reducing the risk of corruption," the Fund observed and highlighted a series of weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

Saying that internal audit was weak in Pakistan, the report noted that the Public Finance Management (PFM) Act 2019 required the creation of a Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) in each division to work directly with principal accounting officers no later than 2020.

"Despite this provision, there has been no implementation and appointment of CIAs," the IMF said.

It said that 25 chief finance and accounts officers (CFAOs) were working in ministries for financial management — a distinct role — but CIAs have not been posted in all ministries and divisions and CFAOs are also missing in 15 ministries and divisions. The full

Continued on Page 5

FO slams Indian minister's 'delusional' claim

By Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Sunday rejected Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's remarks suggesting Sindh could "return" to India, calling them "delusional and dangerously revisionist."

In a sharply worded statement, the FO said Pakistan "strongly condemns the Indian defence minister's delusional and dangerously revisionist remarks regarding Pakistan's Sindh province," describing the comments as reflective of "an expansionist Hindutva mindset that seeks to challenge established realities."

Singh, speaking at an event in Delhi, said: "Today, the land of Sindh may not be a part of India, but civilisationally, Sindh will always be a part of India. And as far as land is concerned, borders can change. Who knows, tomorrow Sindh may return to India again."

Sindh has occasionally featured in Indian rhetoric on Pakistan, most often during heightened tensions or significant developments inside India.

The remarks at Sindhi Samaj Sammelan, a platform related to the Sindhi community, were possibly made to bolster political support by invoking historical and cultural claims.

Islamabad said such

Continued on Page 5

PM's aide extends another offer of talks to PTI

• Rana Sanaullah assails Imran for 'always creating deadlock' • Rejects rigging allegations

By Tariq Saeed

TOBA TEK SINGH: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah on Sunday reiterated the government's offer to the opposition PTI to engage in dialogue and resolve outstanding issues to ensure stability and political reconciliation in the country.

"It is unfortunate that the PTI founder [Imran Khan] was brought into politics despite not being a politician, and he never engaged in real politics," the premier's aide told reporters after casting his vote in the constituency of PP-116, where his son-in-law Ahmed Shaharyar is running as the PML-N candidate.

"During his [Imran Khan's] tenure, his focus remained solely on making cases against his opponents," he added.

RANA Sanaullah casts his vote.—APP

He recalled Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's "unconditional offer" that he made in August to all political parties to become a part of the 'Misaq-i-Istehkam-i-Pakistan' (Charter for Stability of Pakistan). "We are still in favour of politicians sitting together at a table to resolve issues," he said.

Slams Imran

Mr Sanaullah criticised the PTI founder for "always creating a deadlock," emphasising that "democracy progresses through dialogue".

"A person is sitting in jail, yet from there he wants to spread chaos, anarchy, and fitna [evil] in the country. There are also recent examples, such as May 9 [2023] and Nov 26 [2024]," he said, referring to Mr Khan and the PTI's protests.

Responding to a question about the low voter turnout, the senior politician noted that while general elections usually record a turnout of 50 to 60 per cent, by-elections usually saw only around 25 to 30pc on average.

"I contested seven elections in my constituency, out of which I won five," he

Continued on Page 5

EU backs Pakistan's call for Kabul to rein in terror outfits

• Dar meets EU chief envoy in Brussels, both urge Taliban to root out terrorism from Afghan soil • Joint statement asks Afghanistan rulers to ensure protection of human rights, abide by Doha accord

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: As ties between Islamabad and Kabul remain frosty due to an increase in terrorism in the country, Pakistan and the European Union (EU) on Sunday urged Afghanistan to rein in terrorist groups operating from its soil and ensure the protection of human rights, especially those of women and girls.

The development came after the 7th Strategic Dialogue between Pakistan and the EU was convened in Brussels. The meeting was co-chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and the EU's chief diplomat Kaja Kallas.

According to a joint statement shared by the Foreign Office (FO), FM Dar and EU's Kallas discussed relations between Islamabad and Kabul amid cross-border tensions last month, with both top diplomats reaffirming their commitment to regional peace, stability, prosperity, and resolving issues with neighbours through dialogue.

"The two sides called on Afghanistan's de facto authorities to play a constructive role in achieving the shared objective of rooting out terrorism from Afghan soil," the statement read.

It added that they also expressed concern over Kabul's deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and were in favour of a "peaceful, stable and self-reliant Afghanistan".

They also hoped that Afghanistan would advocate for a "credible political process aligned with the UN-led 'Doha process', and in line with the commitments made by the Taliban de-facto authorities to the international community", according to the statement.

It added that the EU appreciated Pakistan's hosting millions of Afghan nationals for over four decades, but emphasised that any repatriation must be "safe, dignified and in line with international standards".

"Both sides called upon the Afghan authorities to ensure protection of human rights, especially for

Continued on Page 5

Two courts jostle for space in 'joint-family home'

Islamabad judiciary wary as newly formed Federal Constitutional Court could potentially usurp its coveted Constitution Avenue location

By Malik Asad in Islamabad

AFTER receiving a warm and cordial welcome during its inauguration at the Islamabad High Court (IHC) building, calls are now growing to shift the newly-formed Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) to its originally-designated premises, in the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) building.

The ongoing tug-of-war over who gets control of the Constitution Avenue premises is increasingly starting to resemble a joint family squeezed into an old ancestral home, where every member complains about inadequate space and competing needs.

Last week, the Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA) demanded that the FCC be moved out of its temporary location within the IHC building, asserting that the new court must eventually operate from the FSC premises.

The bar leadership also warned that any attempt to relocate the IHC itself would be met with determined legal and democratic resistance.

The establishment of the FCC has exposed what many observers describe as a lack of planning on the part of policymakers. The FCC — initially part of the 26th Constitutional Amendment package, but removed shortly before its passage — was reintroduced in the 27th Amendment.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had reportedly finalised the FSC building for the FCC days before the amendment was tabled in parliament.

However, the decision to convert the FSC building into the FCC's permanent home was taken unilaterally, without consulting Shariat Court judges. Under the plan, four FSC judges and a backlog of only 56 pending petitions were to be shifted to the IHC's third floor, where the Capital Development Authority (CDA) was instructed to urgently prepare four new courtrooms.

A VIEW of the congested conference room where new Federal Constitutional Court judges were sworn in.—Dawn

Simultaneously, the CDA was tasked with renovating FSC courtrooms for FCC judges. But when CDA teams arrived to take possession of the Shariat Court premises, the administration strongly resisted, even preventing their entry.

FSC Chief Justice Iqbal Hameedur Rehman, along with other judges, subsequently met Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi and conveyed their reservations over what they termed a unilateral and abrupt order, requiring them to vacate their purpose-built premises within a week.

A senior lawyer remarked that the situation was ironic: "A tenant is normally granted at least a month to vacate a rented property, yet the FSC judges were expected to leave within a week from a building acquired specifically for the Shariat Court".

Cramped space

After the 27th Amendment was passed and received presidential assent, the oath-taking ceremony of the FCC Chief Justice was held at the Presidency, attended by the top civil, military and legal leadership.

But with the FSC building still not handed over to the FCC, the oath-taking for the judges had to be held at the Islamabad High Court.

The initial oath ceremony for three judges took place on November 14 at an open space at the IHC, where IHCBA office-bearers and senior lawyers warmly greeted the newly-appointed judges.

The following day, Justice K.K. Agha was administered the oath in a cramped conference room, which could accommodate barely 25-30 people. On November 17, the oaths of

Continued on Page 11

ON OTHER PAGES

Specialised unit to check terrorism

KP CM Mohammad Sohail Afridi has designated the special branch of police as a separate specialised unit to meet the province's intelligence and counter-terrorism requirements. In an official statement, the CM said that provision of all necessary human resources, technical equipment, infrastructure and other facilities would be ensured on a priority basis to upgrade the unit on modern lines. **Page 9**

Shaheens retain 'Rising Stars' title

Pakistan Shaheens defended a modest 125 to beat Bangladesh 'A' in a nerve-shredding Super Over thriller and successfully defend their Asia Cup Rising Stars title. In a final that swung wildly in the space of 40 minutes, Pakistan were bowled out for 125 after yet another top-order meltdown, only for their spinners to rip through Bangladesh 'A' and leave them reeling at 53 for 7. **Page 18**

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